Indianapolis City Hall (Indiana State Museum)
202 North Alabama Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-156

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WHATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20240

HABS No. IN-156

Name:

Indianapolis City Hall (original name)

Indiana State Museum (present name)

Location:

202 North Alabama Street

Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

Present Owner:

State of Indiana

Present Occupant:

Indiana State Museum and

offices of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources

Present Use:

The Indiana State Museum was established to collect, preserve and interpret the natural, historical, and

cultural heritage of the Hoosier state.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Significance

At the time of its construction, City Hall symbolized the "coming of age" of Indianapolis as a major Midwestern metropolis. Before its construction, city government had been homeless, leasing offices in a multitude of private buildings. At last, after 60 years of existence, municipal government occupied a suitably monumental edifice worthy of civic pride.

Today, City Hall calls to mind the city's "golden age" of prosperity and civic achievement at the beginning of the 20th century. In that epoch, Indianapolis government adopted a new charter; a modern chamber of commerce took shape and sought improvements; the city annexed surrounding towns and settled areas; a municipal park system was established; and an ambitious park development and "city beautiful" boulevard plan became a reality. In other realms, business and industry prospered as never before, as did the arts and literature. The City Hall came as a capstone to that age of accomplishment.

On a different level, City Hall triggers memories of municipal government as it existed for over half a century. Mayors, City Councilmen, municipal boards, department heads, planners, clerks and secretaries all made their marks on the city while working in City Hall offices. Walking through the rotunda and corridors today, one is struck by the spacious chambers, the ceremonial atmosphere, and the architectural grandeur of City Hall. The building even at present provides the vistor with a grasp of the imposing setting in which government was conducted before the era of governmental consolidation and sleek, towering skyscrapers. City Hall supplies a vivid contrast to its successor to the south: the austere, 28-story City-County Building, a symbol of the present era.

Architectural Significance

The City Hall is a fine example of the Neoclassical Revival style of architecture, which was the most popular style for civic buildings in the United States from about 1900 to the First World War. Design motifs were selected from both the Greek and Roman orders of architecture to create a unique composition. The lavishness of the materials of the building — an exterior predominately of Bedford limestone and an interior enriched by marble flooring and wall paneling, mahogany woodwork, and a stained glass, domed skylight — is representative of the Neoclassical's emphasis upon quality materials, which has seldom been equaled in periods of architecture that have followed. The use of the renowned Indiana limestone for the city hall of the state's capital city was a most appropriate choice of materials to express civic pride.

At the time of its construction, architect Preston C. Rubush referred to the building as being "a heavy, monumental style of architecture with which nothing in Indianapolis can compare except the Federal Building." This latter building, designed by Rankin and Kellogg of Philadelphia and constructed in 1905, undoubtedly had a strong influence upon the architecture of the City Hall. Although both buildings were part of the mainstream of contemporary architectural design throughout the country, the Federal Building established the Neoclassical Revival in Indianapolis and lent much of its vocabulary to the City Hall.

The City Hall has managed to survive to the present day with minimal exterior alteration of an irrevocable nature. The primary change to the exterior — the sealing of its windows — occurred with its change of function from a center of municipal government to a museum. (The effect of this alteration is discussed in II-A.)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

- 1. Date of erection: The Indianapolis Board of Public Works received construction bids for the City Hall on March 8, 1909. The Board awarded the contracts for construction on April 14, 1909; work began immediately thereafter. The cornerstone laying ceremonies for the building occurred on July 27, 1909. The contractors completed work on the Hall in November, 1910; dedication ceremonies were held on December 21, 1910.
- 2. Architect: The architects of the old City Hall were the Indianapolis firm of Rubush and Hunter, who won an architectural competition held in the fall of 1908 for the design. First prize in the competition brought Rubush and Hunter acceptance of their plans, the position of supervising architects for the construction, and a fee of five percent of the estimated cost of \$600,000 for the building.

Rubush and Hunter's authorship of City Hall plans is well documented. Their name appears on the cornerstone; contemporary newspaper accounts credit them repeatedly with the design; and their original working drawings for the City Hall survive (see III-A).

With respect to the career of Preston C. Rubush (1867-1947) and Edgar O. Hunter (1873-1949), their firm was unquestionably one of the leading architectural practices in the city of Indianapolis and the state of

Indiana from the firm's establishment in 1905 until the outbreak of World War II. Rubush and Hunter designed scores of important institutional, governmental, retail, hotel, theatre, office, and industrial buildings in Indianapois and other cities of Indiana. Just a few of the prominent buildings in the capital city include the Masonic Temple (1906-07), the Columbia Club (1925), the Indiana State School for the Deaf (1911), the former H. P. Wasson and Company department store (1937), Hotel Lincoln (1918, razed), the Circle and Indiana Theatres (1916 and 1927-28, respectively), the Hume-Mansur Building (1911, razed), the Circle Tower office building (1929-30), and the former Coca-Cola Bottling Company plant (1931, 1940). In addition, the firm developed major real estate interests in Florida. This connection led to their design in 1925 of the Hollywood Beach Hotel, in Hollywood Beach, Florida.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: On April 15, 1909, the Indianapolis Board of Public Works awarded the contract for construction to the Westlake Construction Company, general contractors of St. Louis. The City had earlier retained George M. Brill as supervising engineer for construction. It was on Brill's recommendation that the Board of Works selected the Westlake Construction Company.

Bedford limestone from Lawrence County, Indiana (considered to be the best source for such stone by Rubush and Hunter) provides the facing for all four elevations of the Hall.

Besides the general contractor, Westlake Construction Company, the other contractors retained for the City Hall construction included the Kirkhoff Brothers Company, the Indianapolis Plumbing and Heating Company, the Hatfield Electric Company, the Otis Elevator Company, Lilly and Stalnaker (hardware), the Cutler Manufacturing Company, the American Air Cleaning Company, and the Sanborn Electric Company.

- 4. Original plans and construction: See next item and III-A.
- 5. Alterations and additions: The original exterior and interior design of the City Hall remained essentially unaltered until the 1964-66 rehabilitation of the building for reuse as the Indiana State Museum. The Indianapolis firm of James Associates, Architects and Engineers, supervised the project.

At that time, the following alterations occurred: nearly all window openings were sealed with Bedford limestone, as were grills in the fourth story; ceilings in the former offices of the interior were dropped to cover mechanical systems; and most of the former office chambers in the interior were merged to form large museum galleries.

B. <u>Historical Context</u>

The construction of the City Hall is closely associated with the career of Charles A. Bookwalter, Mayor of Indianapolis from 1901 to 1903 and from 1906 to 1910. Until Bookwalter's second term, Indianapolis city government had no home of its own, occupying scattered offices in the Marion County Courthouse and in private office buildings.

Bookwalter set as a primary goal for his 1906-to-1910 term to erect a suitably monumental city hall.

The Mayor tried first, in 1907, to gain agreement for a city building on the same block as the County Courthouse. Failing in that, he expanded his city hall scheme to include a civic auditorium. The site was to be that of the City Market, located immediately north of the Courthouse Square. Bookwalter secured a bond issue for the civic auditorium/city hall and retained the firm of Rubush and Hunter to prepare working drawings. (Remarkably, these drawings have survived in their entirety, in the possession of Harry E. Hunter, AIA.) Construction was about to begin when a lawsuit brought by two butchers of the City Market permanently enjoined the City from using the Market site for a non-market purpose.

Thus foiled, Bookwalter changed strategies and sites. The next year, in the fall of 1908, he persuaded the City Council to approve the concept of a City Hall only, to cost \$600,000. The Mayor proposed a third site north of the City Market, on the northwest corner of Alabama and Ohio Streets. The Council at the Mayor's request also approved a new bond issue of about \$600,000 to underwrite the construction cost. Later, an additional \$70,000 was transferred from the civic auditorium fund, making a total construction cost at completion of approximately \$670,000. The land for the hall required a further expenditure of \$113,000.

Despite vociferous opposition from the evening Indianapolis News (then secretly owned by Bookwalter's political opponent, U. S. Vice-President Charles W. Fairbanks), the Mayor plunged ahead with the City Hall plans. In November he and a building committee of the City Council awarded first prize and the position of supervising architects to Rubush and Hunter for the latters' entry in an architectural competition held for the City Hall's design.

According to accounts published by the <u>Indianapolis News</u>, the other four architects who participated in the competition protested the estimates quoted by Rubush and Hunter as being too low for the building projected. Complaints also circulated that the planned foundations were too large, that the stones used in construction would be too massive to move, that the alley elevations were too elaborate, and that steel, rather than stone, would be cheaper to use in the structure of the hall.

The <u>Indianapolis Star</u>, the <u>News'</u> morning competitor, supported the Mayor's plans. In March 1909 it published a rebuttal by Preston C. Rubush of all the charges being rumored. Apparently the charges had little basis, as the building program proceeded smoothly on schedule. Contracts were awarded on April 14, 1909, and the cornerstone was laid on July 27, 1909. At the July ceremony, the embattled Mayor Bookwalter seized upon a phrase used by Governor Thomas R. Marshall in the latter's cornerstone address. The phrase, "I am myself a citizen of no mean city," had originated with Paul of Tarsus in the New Testament. In the 1890s ex-President Benjamin Harrison had used it in reference to Indianapolis. In 1909 Charles Bookwalter

declared that the phrase would become the motto underlying the construction of City Hall. It would symbolize the civic pride that he felt the Hall inspired. He therefore had the phrase inscribed in the cornerstone, where it remains today.

Work continued rapidly on the building. Although it was not complete when Mayor Bookwalter left office at the end of 1909, the City Hall was finished in only a year and a half. It fell to Bookwalter's folksy, populist successor, Samuel Lewis ("Lew") Shank, to welcome dignitaries and the public alike to dedication ceremonies held on December 21, 1910.

Rubush and Hunter's plans provided for spacious quarters for each major department of city government. The City Controller and the Board of Public Works shared the first floor. The Mayor, City Attorney, City Engineer, and Building Inspector occupied suites on the second floor. The Board of Park Commissioners, the Board of Public Safety, and the Board of Health could be found on the third floor. Finally, the City Council sat in a lofty chamber on the fourth floor, with a gallery provided for the public to look down upon Council proceedings.

This arrangement remained largely unchanged through much of the 50 years of the building's life as City Hall. Some departments moved out to larger, rented offices, but the principal statutory offices of city government remained.

When the movement began in the 1950s to consolidate the city and county buildings into a single, new edifice, City Hall's future fell into doubt. When the City of Indianapolis moved in 1962 into the just-completed City-County Building, City Hall went up for sale. A real estate brochure advertising its possibilities as an office building was circulated nationally, without result.

At length, in 1963, the City Council approved a lease of the former City Hall to the State of Indiana to house the Indiana State Museum. A rehabilitation program from 1964 to 1966 adapted the building to museum purposes, a use that continues to date. In 1973 the State of Indiana purchased the museum building from the City of Indianapolis.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior

The City Hall building is generally rectangular in plan with dimensions of 188 by 133 feet, its main elevation being parallel to the longitudinal axis. The three main stories above the basement are surmounted by a fourth, attic story and a flat roof raised above a convex slope atop the attic. The immense granite foundations that support all walls are not visible above grade level. Much of the interior partitioning was constructed of fireproof construction tiles, while the exterior walls are of hard-burnt brick faced with a veneer of Bedford limestone.

The most prominent feature of the main elevation is the row of twostory, engaged, columns, which define the seven central bays of the second and third stories. This central section of the facade is recessed from the plane of the two flanking end bays. The row of engaged columns represents a variation on the theme of the colossal portico so common to Neoclassical Revival buildings, while at the same time it serves as an important organizational device. The fluted columns are of the Roman Doric order, which was less commonly used than the Greek orders in buildings of this style. The unusual capitals are composed of a combination of moldings, including the egg-and-dart. The two end bays afford a clear display of the smoothly surfaced, finely jointed, coursed ashlar stonework important to the desired effect of the Neoclassical.

The focal point of the building occurs at the three central, pedimented doorways. A monumental flight of 13 steps with two landings leads to these portals. The tall bronze torcheres on stone bases that flank each of the entrances are unusual for their survival to the present day, though their original triplet of globes have been replaced in recent years by a single, large globe. The torcheres exhibit rams heads, Greek fretwork, and a sheath of leaves pattern similar to those that embellish the top of the doorway architraves. A continuous horizontal band of the Greek frets occurs over the doorways: at the central bay, a second such band echoes the triangular form of the pediment. The three large, bronze doors are recessed from the main facade. The double-leaf doors feature eight circular shields with egg-and-dart moldings and three-dimensional diamond studs. The cyma molding along the door features a talon ornament.

The windows of all floors feature regular, rectangular openings, and all were blocked in by stone facing in recent years during the building's conversion to a museum function. (The one exception to this occurs at the third floor center section of the main elevation, where the windows are only partially blocked but exhibit reflective glass.) This alteration to the windows constitutes the single most important change to the original design of the building. The glass of the double-hung sash was important in relieving the all-stone facade. At the basement level, the windows have completely disappeared, while at attic level, the vents with crosspatterned grilles have been inset with stone panels. The most elaborately adorned windows are those of the second floor. The top rails of the architraves feature "keystones," and ancons support a projecting hood molding. This treatment is varied at the two side bays, where the ancons support pediments characteristic of Renaissance buildings.

Above the square abaci of the engaged columns is the entablature, which divides the main stories from the attic story. Above the moldings of the fascia, the frieze is plain except for applied, circular disks. (In a true Roman Doric order, this frieze would have featured triglyphs and metopes. In the architect's original rendering, the frieze carried the carved inscription: "City Hall Erected Anno Domini MCMVIII.") Above the frieze runs a dentil band — hallmark of Neoclassical Revival detailing — topped by another egg-and-dart molding before the final projecting cornice. The panelled attic story visually extends the unorthodox entablature to roof level.

All four elevations of the building are equally well finished and repeat all the same architectural themes described for the main facade, with the exception of the entranceways. (At the time of construction, the equal

treatment of facades on narrow alleyways was criticized as an extravagance. The demolition of a building to the north has borne out the wisdom of the architect in insisting upon equality in elevations. The north and south elevations are exact duplicates with composition based on six engaged columns. The west elevation varies from the other three in its employment of pilasters rather than engaged columns.

B. Description of the Interior

Upon entering the building through the front portals, one encounters the vestibule, one of the most richly finished and interesting spaces of the interior. The arched ceiling is defined by three groin vaults that spring from unornamented, white marble columns along the perimeter of the rectangular plan. The diagonal and transverse ribs of these vaults are of an accenting color to contrast with the mosaic work of the ceiling. All wall surfaces are of the same white marble as the Roman Doric columns. The side walls of Roman arch form feature recessed, circumscribed arches further accented by a contrasting, inlaid marble arch. Into the focal point of these side walls are set two bronze torchères similar to those on the exterior of the entrance doors. Further illuminating the space are three original bronze light fixtures hanging from chains fixed to the bosses of the vaults.

As are the floors of all lobbies and corridors of the building, the floor of the vestibule is of highly polished marble with geometric patterns inlaid in contrasting colors. The pattern features three squares corresponding to the groin vaults, with inscribed circles and squares. The designs of the floors are derived from Roman architecture as known through the discovery of Pompeian domestic architecture. Three Roman arches, into which modern glass doors have recently been set, lead to the large central lobby of the building.

The central space of the lobby continues up dramatically through four stories (85 feet) to a magnificent 750-square-foot, stained-glass, domed skylight — the glory of the interior. At each level, an encircling balustrade defines the rotunda. The effect of this visually delightful, spatial characteristic of the building is quite awe-inspiring. All former city offices radiated from this space via a system of crossing corridors. Directly opposite the entrance along the west wall of the building, a grand stairway rises to all four floors. From the single flight of four steps from floor level, the marble stairway proceeds in double ramps with half-turns and intermediate landings. Its original finishes have remained unchanged.

An author of architectural history has stated that "one would not be surprised to be told that more marble was used in building in the United States in the years 1900-1917 than was used in the Roman Empire in its entire history." The lavish use of marble on the interior of the City Hall would tend to support this statement. White marble panels with pilasters to a height of approximately 12 feet line the walls of the corridors. Above this "dado," the walls are plastered; "baseboards" in antiqua verde marble join wall plane and floor. The columns of the rotunda area have bases of this same dark green marble, while the shafts are of scagliola of a lighter green color.

These columns feature narrow, bronzed capitals composed of egg-and-dart and foliar moldings. The columns support an entablature with a plain frieze ornamented by circular disks similar to those of the exterior's frieze. The cornice displays dentil blocks capped by more of the ubiquitous egg-and-dart molding.

The stained glass skylight is most readily associated with those of Tiffany fame. The leaded spokework radiates from a central diamond with concentric circles forming a supporting grid. Abstract floral and geometric patterns are interwoven with such naturalistic designs as wreaths with acorns and several varieties of fruit. The diffused light from the multicolored glass in pastel shades creates an effect that lends warmth to the cold marble finishes modeled on antiquity.

From the stained glass dome, a Foucault pendulum installed in 1967 now hangs and swings over the "compass rose" design of the marble first floor. A circular railing, which was installed at this time to protect the pendulum, interferes with the former free circulation pattern across the main floor. The compass design at the center of the building echoes the circles of the rotunda and thereby serves to help define its space. From concentric circles in contrasting marbles, four main spokes extend to the four points of the compass with intermediary spokes in a sunburst pattern. Flanking the circle composition are two smaller circles with the diamond-over-square motif so prevalent in Roman floor design.

The Cincinnati design firm of William F. Behrens was commissioned to provide the distinctive murals decorating the central lobby walls on all floors. Rectangular in form and located just below cornice level, these murals simulate an antique character. At their center are busts of classical maidens, enwreathed by floral form, with symbols of the Zodiac at each side.

With the mid-1960s renovation of the building during its conversion to a museum, the majority of original city offices were made into exhibit areas. Ceilings were lowered to accommodate new mechanical systems, and much of the original finish was lost or hidden to create non-distracting gallery areas. Hardwork floors were covered with traffic-resistant materials deemed more suitable to the museum function. Some original mahogany woodwork survives in office doors and their surrounds set into Roman arch forms and in the rotunda and stairway railings. Numerous original pendant light fixtures (as described in the vestibule) also continue to function to the present day.

C. <u>Description of the Site</u>

The City Hall is located at the northwest corner of East Ohio and North Alabama Streets, four blocks northeast of the circle that marks the center of Indianapolis. The building occupies nearly all of its lot, which measures a 202.5 feet frontage along Alabama with a depth of 133 feet. Its most prominent neighbor is the Stone Stafford Building, a former Knights of Pythias lodge to the west, separted only by a narrow alley. Coincidentally, this five-story brick building was

designed by the same architectural firm (Rubush and Hunter) in 1905.

Much of the urban character of this site has been eroded by the sea of surface parking lots that now surround the building on its other sides. The City Hall currently faces an immense parking lot directly across the street, and buildings formerly occupying the city block bounded by Ohio, Alabama, New York, and the alley have been torn down and replaced by another large surface parking lot.

Recent landscaping has altered the ground lines of the building, especially at its southeast corner. Between the original, molded granite curbline and the edge of the building, low yew shrubs and an ivy ground-cover have been introduced. Three small fruit trees have been planted along the south side, while two similar trees are located to the northeast near the parking lot. Another recent addition to the site are the two stone, sculpted eagles situated at the edge of the granite curbing at each side of the first landing of the front flight of stairs. These eagles formerly ornamented the Traction Terminal Building, designed by D. H. Burnham and Co. of Chicago in 1904 and razed in 1968. The base upon which these sculptures have been placed originally supported two bronze flag standards, each three stories tall.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings (see pages 12 through 21 of this document)*

The City of Indianapolis is indeed fortunate: the original, February 1909, ink-on-linen tracings of the plans and elevations for the City Hall have survived. They are currently in keeping of Harry E. Hunter, AIA, President of Tislow, Hunter and Associates, Architects (address: 9101 Wesleyan Road, Indianapolis, Indiana 4626B). Mr. Hunter is a grandnephew of Edgar O. Hunter of the firm Rubush and Hunter. He also preserves at his office a large watercolor rendering by artist D. A. Gregg of the City Hall, dated 1909.

The specifications for the City Hall apparently have not survived. Neither have the various contracts for construction. Nevertheless, the structural plans for the building, prepared by Rubush and Hunter in consultation with George M. Brill (the City's consulting engineer) do exist as ink-on-linen tracings at the office of Harry Hunter. *Negatives for these plans are in the field records and can be reproduced.

B. Early Views

Mr. Hunter also possesses three, 1910 photographs showing the Ohio and Alabama Street elevations and the interior rotunda. The three photographs and the rendering mentioned above were all apparently commissioned by Rubush and Hunter. A fourth photograph, taken shortly after 1910 by the W. H. Bass Photo Company of Indianapolis (Bass Photograph #27899) shows the Alabama Street elevation to good advantage; a print is in the files of the Indianapois Historic Preservation Commission (Suite 705, 155 East Market Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204).

C. Bibliography

- 1. Primary sources:
 - a. Cornerstone of City Hall, southeast corner of the building.
 - b. Original, February 1909, working drawings for City Hall in the possession of Harry E. Hunter, AIA.

2. Secondary sources:

- a. Dunn, Jacob Piatt. <u>Greater Indianapolis</u>, 2 vols. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1910. Volume 2, p. 903.
- b. Indiana and Indianans, vols. Chicago:
 The American Historical Society, 1919. Volume 5, pp.2240-41.
- c. "Indiana Biography Series" (scrapbooks), vols. Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis. Volume 32, pp. 7-8; Volume 34, p. 91.
- d. Indianapolis Star, July 16, 1907, p. 18, c. 4.
- e. "City Will Build City Hall, Cost \$600,000," <u>Indianapolis News</u>, September 21, 1908, p. 14.
- f. "'Family' Gathering Over City Hall Plans," <u>Indianapolis News</u>, November 3, 1908, p. 12.
- g. "Say City Hall Plans Are Not Within Cost," <u>Indianapolis News</u>, November 23, 1908, p. 2.
- h. "First Floor Plan of the New City Hall as Agreed Upon," Indianapolis Star, February 14, 1909, p. 7.
- i. "Second Floor Plan for the New City Hall Building," Indianapolis Star, February 15, 1909, p. 3.
- j. "Rubush Discusses City Hall Charges," <u>Indianapolis Star</u>, March 7, 1909, p. 10, c. 1.
- k. "Work to Begin at Once on City Hall," <u>Indianapolis Star</u>, April 15, 1909, p. 1.
- 1. Indianapolis Star, July 28, 1909, p. 14., c. 3.
- m. "City's New Home Awaits Occupancy," <u>Indianapolis Star</u>, November 6, 1910, p. 33.
- n. "City's First Home Officially Opened," <u>Indianapolis Star</u>,
 December 22, 1910, p. 1.
- o. Walter Spencer, "Motto in City Hall Cornerstone Stires Controversy Over Meaning," <u>Indianapolis Times</u>, March 4, 1962, p. 4.

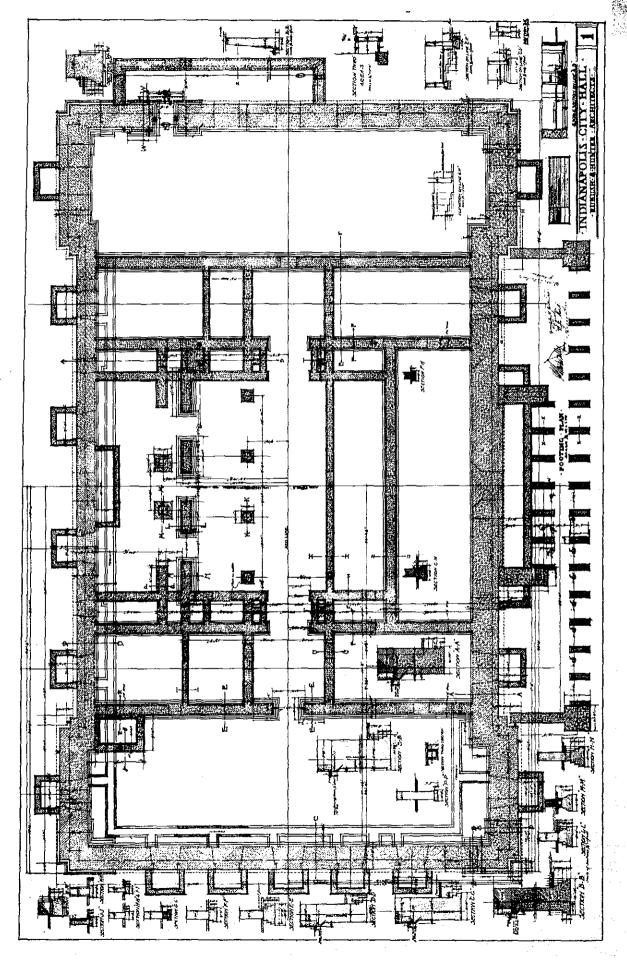
- p. "It Should Remain," <u>Indianapolis Star</u>, August 5, 1962, sec. 2, p. 7.
- q. Indianapolis Star, October 31, 1983, p. 17, c. 1.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

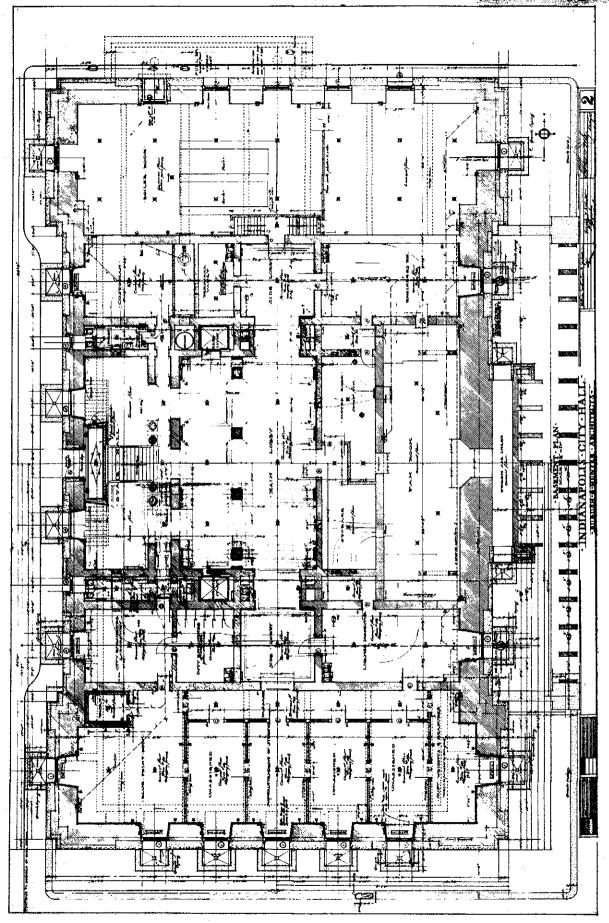
Most known sources have been investigated. One that most likely contains further information is the "Proceedings of the Common Council of Indianapolis" for the period 1907 to 1910. Copies of these minutes are available at the City Clerk's Office, Room 241, City-County Building, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204.

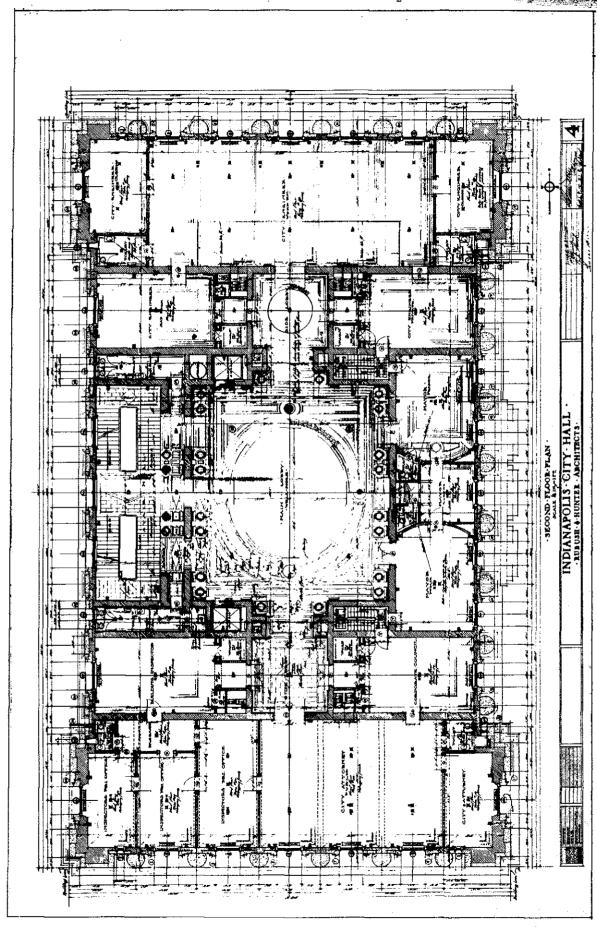
It has not been conclusively determined that the construction contracts and building specifications no longer survive. It is possible that they have been recorded in miscellaneous city record books not yet investigated.

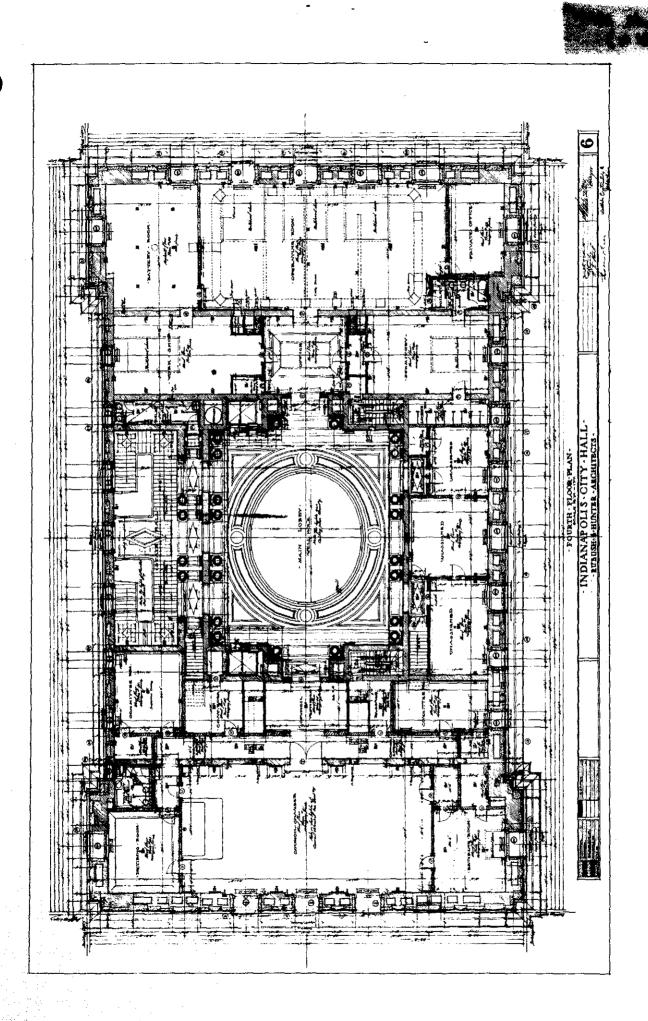
PREPARED BY JAMES A. GLASS, HISTORIAN AND MARY ELLEN GADSKI, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN, INDIANAPOLIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

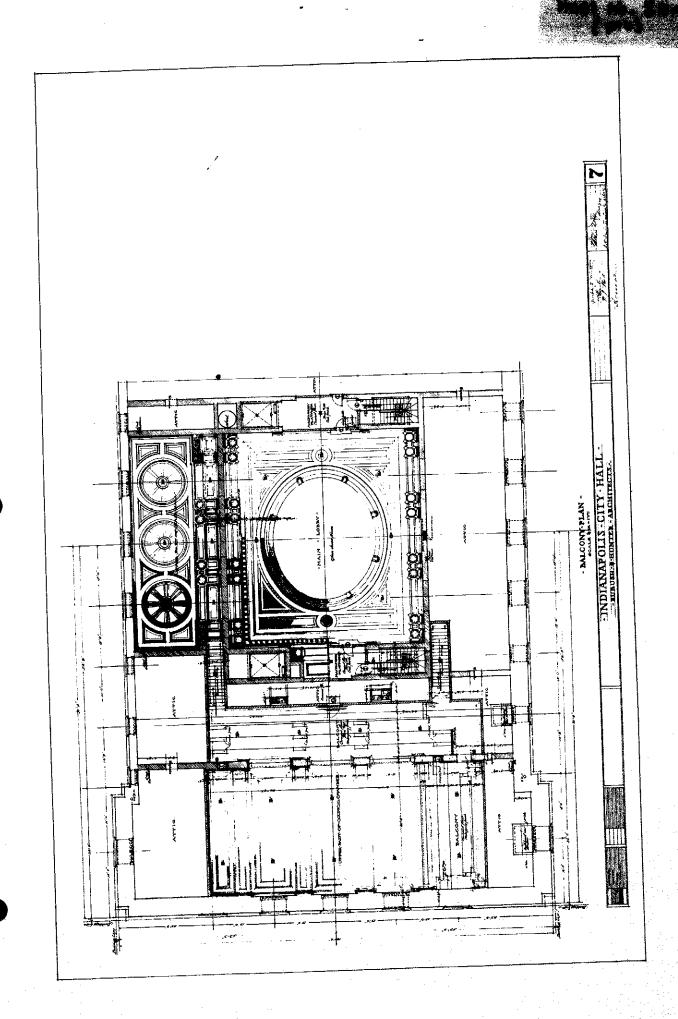


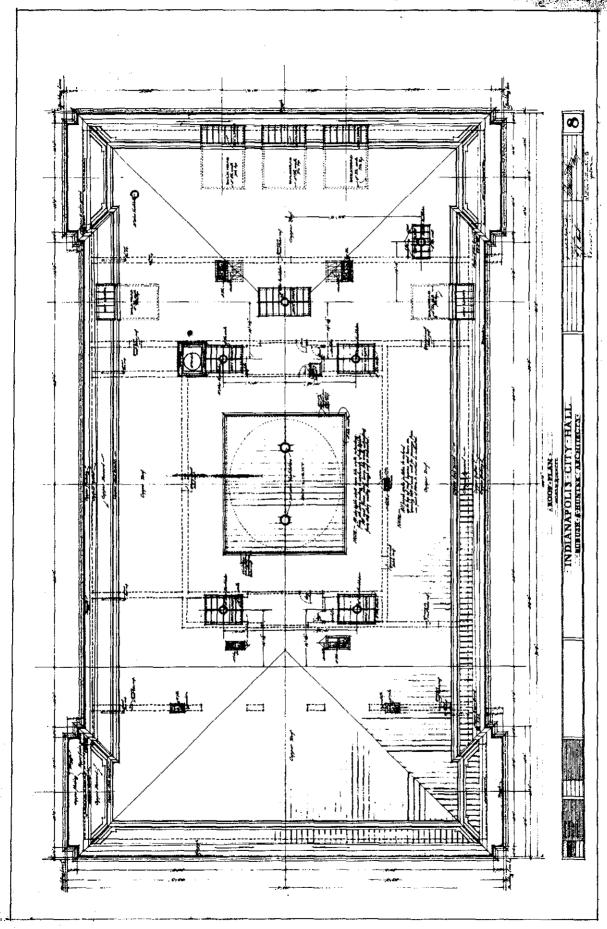


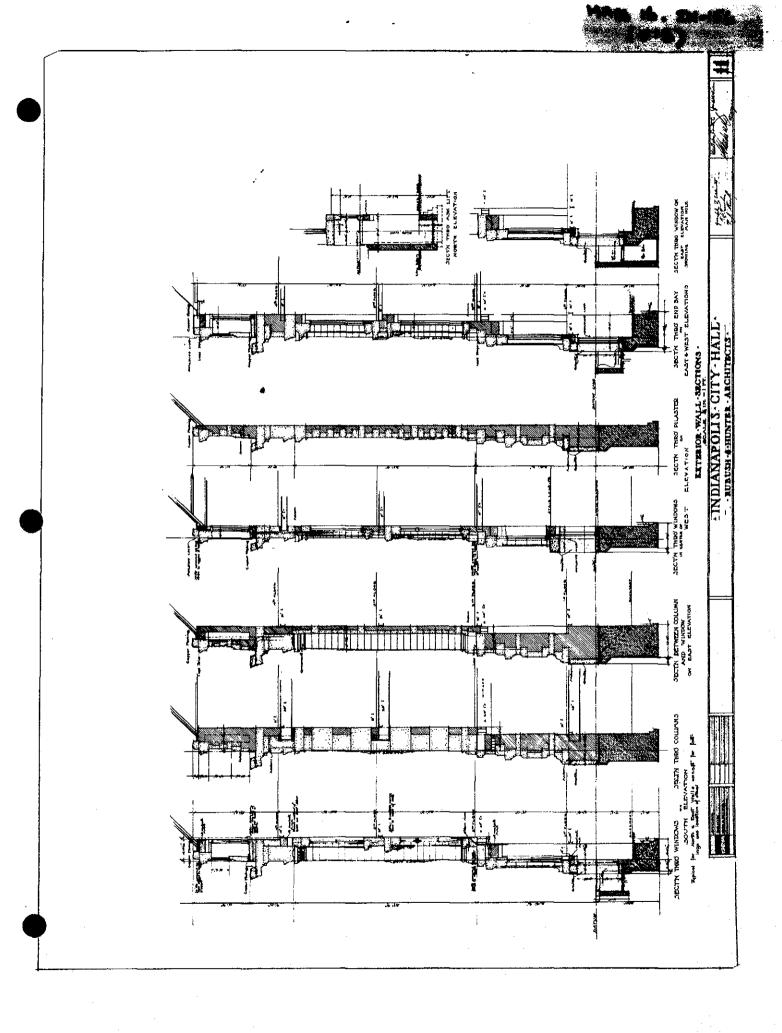


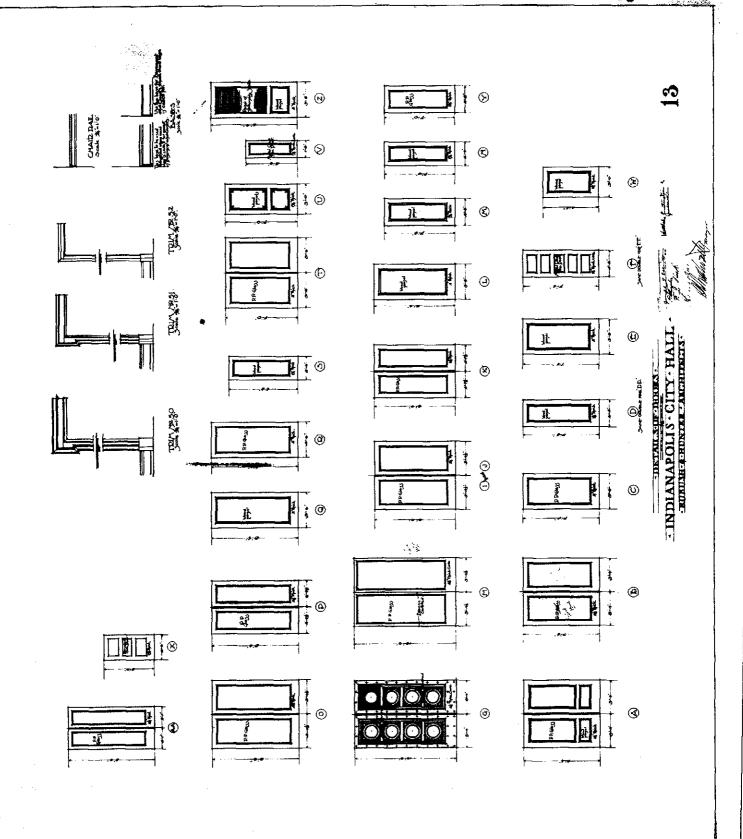












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